

Linda Clair
Seven-day Meditation Retreat
Kallara Conference Centre – September 2019
Transcription from Audio Recordings

File 3b – Monday morning discussion session

Question: I did what you said and it was pretty good. Yesterday when we were talking about the breath and, “Be careful what you wish for.” (laughing) So that was this morning’s sit, pretty much a total body experience. The thoughts were so small and being able to cut them before they... It was quite an amazing thing, I was so in that body space. The thoughts were so small, for a while. And what you might be tempted to call pain, that was the whole body. It was discomfort more than anything else.

Linda: But that does keep you in your body. It forces you to be in your body and then your body becomes dominant. There are still thoughts and reactions, “Oh, I can’t stand this,” but it’s mainly the body.

Question: Grateful for your instruction. I guess I trust you.

Linda: Well, that’s the only way you’re really going to trust me or any other teacher: I give you advice, you try it out, something like that happens and, “Ah, I trust this.” And it’s not just me, it’s this whole process, the whole thing. And then you stop trusting your mind, that’s the thing. And then you start to trust your body. And the mind, you see it for what it is, which is just rubbish really, pointless chatter. So very good. Just keep doing it, you have to persevere. You can have a sit where you go, “Wow, this is amazing!” And then the next it will pull out all the stops and undermine you again. But as I said, this is not a sprint, it’s an endurance, it’s a marathon.

Question: And I remembered something you said to me in Perth when I said, “I had a kind of peak experience.” You said you have to rest after that. Well the sit after that I was dead tired. I remembered what you said so I thought, “Okay, don’t push myself, don’t expect too much because of that.” That was really good.

Linda: And it’s the same with this. The next sit, just keep going, persevere. Try not to expect it to be the same. And if it’s not happening don’t go, “Oh, it’s not happening now, I’ll give up.” You’ve got to keep going.

Question: It’s so tempting to do that.

Linda: It is, and every step of the way your mind will come in and try and undermine you and stop you doing this. And something like this that you’ve just described might not be this, “Oh, the lights are on, this is amazing!” It’s actually a much, much deeper realisation, more than an experience.

Question: I’m finding that when I go into the body when that kind of thing happens it’s been progressively deeper or different in some way.

Question: How do you breathe through the pain or into the pain? I really struggle with that.

Linda: Well, don't try and breathe through the pain. Use the breath just to try and soften it and make it a bit more bearable. Don't try and enjoy the pain or do anything with it really, except put up with it, endure it. And the breath – just make sure you don't use the breath to try and get away from it but rather to slightly, slightly take the edge off it, to soften it very slightly and remind you, "I'm here, it's okay." But what we tend to do when we feel pain is try and push it away and go the opposite way. You just want to get rid of it, you don't want to sit with it, you don't want to feel pain. So you use anything you can to try and get away from it. Whereas if you can breathe with it, into it, especially if you've got pain down here or nausea, breathe into it. Do the opposite to what we've been taught to do, which is avoid pain at all cost and seek pleasure, because we think pleasure, happiness, that's the ultimate, whereas it's not. So the pain is very, very valuable but don't try and feel anything much about it. Just accept that it's there and know that it is keeping you in your body, it's forcing you to be in your body.

Question: I get to the point where's there's pain and it's intense but if I'm trying to breathe through it or get really close it or do things like face it head on – for me what works best is if I'm just there and I'm grounded and it's there – then it will change into something else. I think I get caught up in doing this or doing that with the pain.

Linda: Well, don't do anything. Just sit there, breathe, watch it, endure it until the end of the sit. So just do what you're doing. And you can tend to feel like there might be this very slight feeling of, "I'm doing something wrong, that's why I'm feeling pain." But it's actually the opposite in this – the pain can be very, very valuable. So you don't look for it. But, in a way, I suppose I did at times try and bring it on because once I'd felt it, just feeling a bit comfortable and okay was not enough. I just wanted to feel this incredible intensity and aliveness that I didn't feel the rest of the time. So the pain, even though it was sort of horrible, it was amazing at the same time and I started to crave that intensity.

Eventually the pain just goes and you realise it was all an illusion, it was just in your mind – it really was. But you can't believe that when it's that strong. But it's much more real than thinking. So just keep doing what you're doing. Use it, put up with as much as you can. So that will come and go until one day it just goes and it will never come back to that degree again. And very occasionally at first you miss it, strangely enough. (laughing) But up until that point it will come, and you need to see that it does come and go, but don't get attached to either thing. Once it's gone for good you'll know, there won't be any question. But up until that point you can really, really use it.

It's like you're raising your pain threshold. Things that you never thought you'd be able to put up with, you can put up with. And that translates into everything in your life, not just sitting here but everything. You can put up with amazing levels of stress and pain.

And you start to see that the physical pain that you do feel when you do things is not all physical. There is quite a large emotional element. So yes, just use it. If you feel like extending yourself, do that but don't overdo it. If it gets a bit too much just back off a bit. But it's up to you, it's totally up to you to challenge yourself. And it's quite exciting to do that because you start to realise anything is possible. The only thing that's in the way is fear. Anything is possible.

Question: I see the other side of the pain, the emotional reactions. And they're not in the same spot as the pain is, they're maybe in the chest or somewhere. That's what I feel.

Linda: The thing about the pain, it's something much more tangible that you can use, whereas thinking – what is it? You start to look at it and it's just nothing. It's just this weird thing that you can't pinpoint, it's nothing, whereas the pain is something very tangible to work with in your body and *forces* you be in your body. And I keep saying you have to be forced to be in your body because it's such a deep habit to not be in your body. So in that way it's so valuable. But it doesn't mean you ever enjoy it. You might accept it and appreciate it, but I never enjoyed it.

Question: I think I was getting caught up in trying to do something with it.

Linda: And you've also got to see that you're the one doing this. You can tend to want to blame the pain on something or someone but really it's totally up to you. And that's also the exciting thing, "This is totally up to me. I can't blame anyone else for this. It's up to me." And then you see, "Well, I'm the one really who got myself into this mess and I'm the one that can get out of it." And sure, you might have had a bit of trauma when you were young and all that stuff but you stop blaming that for how you feel too.

Question: Yes, I'm looking at my tendencies of judging myself for pain, "Oh, I'm not fit enough, I haven't been doing exercise, or I've been doing this or that." I'm seeing that tangled web that I create and it's just so unnecessary.

Linda: Yes, like I was saying yesterday, physical fitness can help a bit because if you are reasonably fit then you're not going to blame that for not being able to sit longer. So it is good to be reasonably okay. But you don't have to be super fit. And it's also good not to take too many stimulants and things like that, but I don't feel it's essential.

Linda: How are you D.? You looked very good sitting this morning.

Question: It's been really intense. I spent the first hour this morning with the raging mind, shockingly angry and aggressive. Then I counted and have been counting permanently.

Linda: Good, do that.

Question: That's been the only relief. I don't know if there is thinking anymore.

Linda: It's all thinking.

Question: There seem to be different layers. Big thoughts come in as a pop, but underneath that there's a constant river of telling me how it is or what's happening. So it's been very intense this morning. I've counted and that's been very good. It feels like I'm really working hard today, this is much more work. I feel like I'm going back to my body more often.

Linda: Good, so keep up the counting. If you feel to, do it the whole sit, do that. You looked very good sitting.

Question: Great! (laughter) I'm a bit shocked by the mind again. When I get to a retreat I'm always shocked by the depth and breadth of it. And it feels a bit whingy, complaining, "Oh, my mind!" (laughing) I definitely feel more aware this time of the work of it, the constancy of it, the coming back, not letting it just go on. That's a difference in me. That feels great.

Linda: To accept that it takes work?

Question: Yes, and that I have to do it; no one will do it for me. (laughing)

Linda: You okay today L.?

Question: Yes, still feeling a little unsettled but I think a bit better. Still more resistance than usual doing the sits.

Linda: That's interesting. That's probably good.

Question: Yes, I'm quite tense. I find myself having to relax more into my body, and then I find myself lost in thought again, and I notice my body is quite tense so I have to relax again. That feels like intensity in the body that I'm struggling to stay with.

Linda: It's the energy that you're trying to cope with and it can make your body quite tense. So it is good to soften. I used to realise my jaw would clench quite a bit and I would go, "Oh," and then soften it. And then a few minutes later the same thing. I think it's just the whole thing, the body trying to cope. So just keep going.

Question: I have a question about the softening or not softening because I've watched my mind when it goes into trying to fix something or change it. So I've been trying to just be with, however it is in the moment, without trying to fix it or change it or move around it, and watching that mind that tries to shift it somehow. I notice I'm getting enormous tension in my shoulders. I didn't know whether to just let it soften or keep being with the tension in the shoulders. Because I noticed it came when I was working with fear, and I was watching that habit of the mind trying to grab it, but then forcing myself to be in and with the body as much I possibly could. And of course it would change. So when to be with it and when to soften it?

Linda: Well, when you feel it in the shoulders like that just sit with it because that's a really common place to feel that tension. So don't consciously try to soften that. Just watch your reaction to it. Don't soften it by moving around, don't start moving your shoulders around, keep them still. Make sure your posture is okay, as good as can be. Just feel it and watch your reaction to it and watch that come up.

It's a bit different to what I said before about jaw clenching – that's a different thing. Just gently soften that. It doesn't mean you have to move it around. But as soon as you notice it with things like that it automatically softens. So just stay still. Try and stay as still as possible and watch your reaction to it and just sit with it as much as you can.

Question: I was wondering if you could talk about emotion, what emotion is? It feels like it's very close to being sensation in the body, like pain rather than thought.

Linda: What are you feeling?

Question: Until a couple of sittings ago my thoughts were very emotionally driven and...

Linda: Charged?

Question: Yes, charged, and ricocheting all over the place. Then it hit a place in my chest which was very strong grief or sadness that seemed to be without thought. And from that time I could come into the body using it like a sensation and be much more anchored in the body, so it's been a helpful tool. I have a vague memory of you saying that emotion is another layer of thought.

Linda: It is: you start to think, you move away from your body, start to think, and then the emotion is a reaction to that. But it becomes so intense that emotions and the thinking are just wound up together. The emotions drive the thinking and the thinking drives the emotions. But you only keep thinking about things because they're emotionally charged. The base emotion is fear – that's what drives everything. But all those emotions you are feeling, yes, you can feel them as sensations in the body. And if you can feel them as a sensation without attaching the story or getting into the emotion and the thought about it, it is very valuable to just feel it as that pure sensation as much as possible.

Question: And then you can work with it in the same way as working with pain?

Linda: Yes, well, pain includes emotional pain too. What were you feeling? How were you feeling it? Can you describe the sensation?

Question: I don't know if I can actually. It's a vast grief. There were a few moments where I was in the hara watching the breath and being with that feeling in my chest. I was almost drawing down to the hara, breathing it in rather than pushing it away. That seemed to make some extraordinary transformation happen for a moment.

Linda: So yes, if you can feel it as a sensation in the body, do that. Stay in your body, and as soon as you start thinking about it come back to the breath to break that. This is all about getting to the source of the desire to think. And that desire to think comes from fear – fear of being here.

So what we're doing is not practicing trying to forget things, but to stop that habit of trying to remember things. And in the end the desire to remember just goes. There's no emotional pull to think, there's no emotional charge in thinking anymore, so you start to lose interest. And eventually there's no reason to think. There's *almost* no desire to think, I wouldn't say no desire.

Question: Do feelings still come and go without thinking?

Linda: Feelings? In a way but different to before. Things change. So the personal feelings become less. They're still there to a degree but they do start to really subside.

On the first day I was here there was a bit of activity in my mind a few times. I felt, "Oh, that's strange, that hasn't happened like that for quite a while." I felt maybe I should be sitting a bit more. It was quite easy to rein it in and then it went. Then yesterday when I was just sitting there – nothing happening really – then suddenly this spontaneous self-inquiry happened. I just suddenly

turned around and there were a few bits of me – it's really hard to describe – remnants of me, that I had been aware of, and suddenly they just dispersed in three different directions and they were gone. It didn't feel hugely dramatic at the time. It just felt like this very undramatic thing, but it did happen, and I have felt different since then.

So yes, there are remnants. You do become less and less, and there is this fear of not being this person that you've built up over the years. So even when you're very clear and very mature there's still a little bit of attachment there to being this person, you don't want to give it up completely. But it all has to go – and it's all timing – when you're ready. There's nothing to be scared of. It's so freeing, it's so amazing, not having these emotions. You think, "Who am I going to be without these emotions, these feeling, who I am, "I'm this person." But, oh, it's just so amazing not being a person. You do think you're going to become more, more this or more that, but the opposite happens.